DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 833 CG 014 430

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TITLE From Empathy to Kenepathy.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 79
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (63rd, Washington, DC, April 4-7, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Cognitive Style; Communication Skills; Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Training; *Empathy; *Humanistic Education; *Human Relations; Interpersonal Competence; Laboratory Training; *Listening Skills; State of the Art Reviews; Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Kenepathy

ABSTRACT

Laboratory method defines empathy colloquially as the ability "to get into another person's shoes," yet very often, empathy training concentrates only on understanding another's feelings. Empathy training should go beyond the ability to understand feelings. Kenepathy is a term which has been coined to broaden the accepted application of 'empathy,' expanding it to include feelings, experience, ideas, prejudices, and other cognitive data. Trainees asked to kenepathize are called upon to grasp the multiple forces in a person's life space and come closer to a real understanding of what that person is trying to communicate. (Author)

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FROM EMPATHY TO KENEPATHY

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Presented at the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors, Annual Conference, April 4-7, 1979.

CG 014430

The term empathy as a household word is of comparatively recent origin. Not until the human relations movement and laboratory method of education came of age did the term appear as routinely as it does now, especially of course in human relations training manuals and training literature and research. Who would dare to describe the "helping process" as defined by leaders such as Carkhuff (1969) and Rogers, et al (1957) without adequately delineating the arch facilitative dimension: empathy? The world of the behavioral sciences has made the word almost as familiar as the three Rs.

Yet educators who remember the '40s can testify that the word was a comparatively esoteric term in those days. The term "human relations," for that matter, was rarely used in educational context (the industrial world may have had an edge on its use) though the ability to relate well with fellow human beings was always considered an essential virtue. In those days, however, "relating to others," was not formally taught in classroom setting as it is today. If it was taught, it had different emphasis.

In the era before the human relations thrust, the burden of "relating well to others" was placed on the person who spoke, on the communicator of ideas and concepts, on the bearer of the message. The communications courses of those days taught individuals to "speak well" -- accurately, precisely, fluently, coherently. If a message misfired or communication failed, it was the fault of the person speaking or it was due

to the ineptness of the deliverer of the message. Rarely was much said about the responsibility of the listener in the transaction. Listening as well as hearing was regarded as indigenous to the human race, a fallacy corrected by the human relations movement and the laboratory method of education in particular.

The human relations movement, along with a number of services rendered, has placed emphasis on the significance of listening. In fact, in training individuals in interpersonal communications skills, it has virtually shifted the major burden of communication responsibility from speaker to listener. One need only sit in on a training session or participate in a laboratory to witness how much time is spent in teaching individuals how to communicate their ideas and their feelings. What "teaching" does go on in this area occurs almost exclusively in the trainer's process of facilitating self disclosure of feelings and perceptions on the part of the participants. These perceptions and feelings are essential data to learning about self and others in the laboratory setting (Bradford, 1964, p. 214). But how to disclose these feelings and perceptions is not "taught." The perceptualists and phenomenologists have validated individuals' right to feel as they feel and to perceive as they perceive; persons are only encouraged to reveal these feelings and perceptions in whatever way they can, always, of course, with sensitivity to others' needs as well as their own. It is the

responsibility of the listener to attend well and to listen so accurately as to be able to decipher with precision what the feelings and perceptions are. If this is accomplished with regularity, then the listener has achieved the queen of the human relations skills; namely, empathy, and even more precisely, "accurate empathy" (Egan, 1975).

Whether or not the human relations devotees should devote themselves so diligently to training listeners as opposed to training coherent speakers is a question someone may wish to raise. It is not my purpose to do so. Though I would be the first to admit that miscommunication can result from either or both inept listeners or sloven speakers or perhaps neither of these, I believe that training individuals to acquire the essential skill of listening, to develop the ability to empathize, is long overdue.

What I would like to discuss is another question that raises its head time and time again as I venture to assist students in the development of their interpersonal competence. The question rises more frequently as I witness human relations training gain momentum as a part of formal curricula at the college and university level, a phenomena welcomed by educators (Cross, 1973; Peterson, 1973). I see human relations training moving from an experimental curricular stage to one in which it is fast becoming recognized as a valid and dignified part of formal higher education curricula. More and more schools are incorporating such training courses

in their programs at the bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels. Manuals for interpersonal development multiply each year (Egan, 1975; Gazda, 1977).

With this gained respect and position, human relations courses must continue to show evidence of their right to be ranked among essential components of formal education. They must become increasingly sophisticated in their contribution to educating the whole person. Those of us, as a result, who serve as trainers and instructors must continually question and refine our methods of training and instructing to insure that they in no way fall short of expectations.

The question that arises time and time again in my mind is one that relates to our understanding of empathy and our training of individuals to develop it. As I use manuals and texts available in training of human relations skills, I detect a shortsightedness in the training of empathy. Perhaps it comes from what I see as a hazy evolution of what empathy is and then an inconsistency in our application of what we have decided it means. Let me explain.

If you look up a dictionary definition of empathy you might find it defined as the projection of one's personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better; intellectual identification of oneself with another. The word gets its derivation from the Greek word empatheia which means affection, passion; or from the German word einfuhlung which means "in feeling". We can conclude

from this that empathy obviously incorporates the notion of being in tune with feelings. It seems, however, to suggest more.

The training literature consensually validates a colloquial definition that enlarges the notion of understanding feelings. It describes empathy as the ability to understand a person's feelings and perceptions, but also as the ability "to get into another person's shoes" (Rogers, 1967; Carkhuff, 1969; Gazda, 1977; Egan, 1975). Egan makes it clear, incidentally, that accurate empathy implies that a person not only be able to understand the feelings of another but to understand the experience behind these feelings (1973; p. 228).

Now if we really believe, as our colloquial definition indicates, that empathy is the ability to get into another's shoes, which implies understanding more than only feelings, why do we often in training for empathy dwell almost exclusively on understanding another's feelings? As I indicated earlier, I do not suggest that feelings are unimportant; they are of prime importance and an essential key to understanding another. But what I do suggest is that we appear to adhere to a definition of empathy as that of getting into another's shoes and yet we do not follow through in our training of individuals with the suggested comprehensiveness that the definition implies.

The phrase, colloquial though it be, is an apt phrase. If we are going to really understand another, what better way than to ego transcend and attempt to get over "into his or her

shoes"? But getting into other individuals' shoes does not mean only understanding feelings, which is often subtly implied in training manuals, in particular in the nature of the exercises incorporated in those manuals. It also means, as has already been suggested, understanding others' perceptions (how they see things, how they hear them, how they sense them) and I quickly add: understanding what they value, what they preconceive and conceive. Though values and preconceptions and even conceptions are often affect laden, they are not synonymous with affect. "Catching feeling" alone will not get at all the data essential in the understanding process. If we do not understand others' ideas or prejudices, for instance, just "catching feeling" is inadequate in attempting to fully understand them.

This fact was brought home to me as I participated some years ago at Boston University in a Laboratory of Community and Human Relations which utilized the format of the C-group (clarification group) as well as the T-group. The goal of the C-group is to focus on sociological as well as psychogical facts in a person's life space and the life space of the group (e.g., ethnic, racial, religious, socioeconomic) to which that person belongs. These facts along with those we identify as a person's immediate feelings and perceptions help more adequately to explain the person's behavior. The C-group "deals with stereotype, prejudice, and distortions in perceptions, judgment, and behavior that are based on group identifications and intergroup conflict" (Babad, Birnbaum, Benne, 1978, p. 169).

Proponents of C-group laboratories believe there are substrata of influences that originate with the subculture of a person that evoke feelings and ways of perceiving and thinking that must be accounted for in understanding that person. The development of the C-group clearly illustrates that behavioral scientists continue to search out methods of training that get at a fuller understanding of human behavior and interchange.

Understanding another person -- getting into his or her shoes -- is no easy task. The magnitude of understanding a human being was made clear by Kurt Lewin (1951) in his delineation of the field of forces in each person's life space. To even approximate comprehensive understanding of a person, we would have to account for and accurately discern all the forces and their interrelationships within that person's life space, a formidable task indeed.

It would seem, then, that as we set as a goal in laboratory education to become adept at empathy -- getting into another's shoes -- that to achieve this goal we must learn to move truly into the internal framework of the person we are trying to empathize with. Brammer explains how the helper, in a helping relationship where empathy is a sine qua non, must get into the internal frame of reference of the person being helped. He or she must ask questions like "What is the helpee feeling right now? How does he view his problem? What does he see in his world?" (1973, p. 30). I would add questions like: What are his ideas? What are his preconceptions, his biases, his prejudices? What are his values, his attitudes? If we restrict the meaning of empathy to only understanding what

a person is feeling, then we capture only a portion of the total frame of reference of that person.

We have come to recognize that for too long educators emphasized and taught to the cognitive level of human beings to the exclusion of the affective level which was left to haphazzard attention by parents and significant others outside the domain of the school. However, stressing only affect in training individuals to achieve or develop interpersonal competence can be as short-sighted as stressing only the cognitive level of functioning.

Perhaps much of our training would be less contrived, perhaps it would resemble back home reality more if we consistently included both cognitive as well as affective level behavior. It seems ironic to make such a statement when for decades humanists have struggled to get educators to recognize affect as a domain deserving of educational attention. I do not wish to diminish the movement toward a full recognition of the importance of affect, but I do wish to suggest that we not err in another direction in an attempt to correct a previous one.

Let me cite an instance in which it is crucial not to neglect both cognitive as well as affective levels. For administrators and managers who are not in a "helping" role per se all of the time, the contrived training setting can be too far removed from their reality if it does not blend in confluent fashion both cognitive and affective levels. These

individuals become aware that they must be task oriented as well as relationship oriented; they must concentrate on cognitive as well as affective functioning. They will be far less convinced of the need to tune into affect if those who train them suggest that affect is the only important level to recognize or if they discover that the affective level of functioning is the only one trainers attend to in the training arena.

Effective managers and administrators are aware of the importance of understanding individuals' ideas as well as their feelings and perceptions. To understand a fellow worker, the manager must have the ability to move in and out of both levels of functioning, to catch the fellow worker's feelings in one minute and the worker's ideas in the next. In training, it is important, I believe to stress this fluidity of movement from affective to cognitive functioning and even more to stress the pervasive simultaneity of both. Until we effect a confluence in training which incorporates both levels of behavior we remain eschew from reality and those we train are quick to identify this fact which leaves them less convinced of the practicability of what they are being trained in.

Several measurers can be taken by instructors and trainers to move toward confluence in training. Let me recount a few that I incorporate in my instruction and training approach.

First, I make certain from the outset that students understand the distinction between cognitive and affective levels of functioning and fully appreciate both. A lecturette with participant discussion can quickly accomplish this goal and set the foundation for future training in listening.

Second, I have engineered a word to convey a corrective concept to what we have allowed the concept of empathy to mean. Students are not long with me in class or training session without being introduced to the concept of kenepathy.

The word kenepathy consists of two small words: ken and pathy. Ken is an archaic Scottish word that ancient bards used in much of their poetry to denote a person's world of knowledge--all that he or she has come to know and experience. Pathy comes from the Greek pathos meaning feeling. Kenepathy, then, in contrast to what we have allowed empathy to mean, incorporates many facets of a person's internal world, not just feeling. It includes the person's knowledge and ideas, attitudes, values, preconceptions and prejudices: all facets of the person's total experience. When trainees are asked to kenepathize, they are challenged to get into the other person's internal world, to attempt to understand as best they can the total experience of the person, what he or she is thinking, feeling, seeing, valuing, devaluing. In effect, trainees are called upon to grasp the multiple forces in a person's life space and come closer to really understanding what that person is trying to communicate.

Once trainees understand the concept of kenepathy as an enlargement of empathy, their understanding is reinforced by exercises that focus on the comprehensiveness of understanding another. Training sessions are conducted in a fashion that does not force them always to reflect what another person says by responding with the statement "you feel..." which tends to condition trainees to reduce all communication to affect. Without diminishing in the least the fact that much of what they must understand in another is affect, they are required also to zero in on what the person is thinking. Furthermore, they are always challenged to distinguish between thought and feeling.

Why is it important to distinguish between what a person feels and thinks? The answer is simple. Ideas and thoughts -- cognitive level functioning -- can be challenged as to accuracy while feelings -- affective level functioning -- cannot be challenged. The person possessing the affect may wish to challenge him or herself because it is based on inaccurate perception, but it is not the responsibility of the listener to challenge this affect. The good listener tries to understand whatever is being expressed and facilitate the appropriate expression of it.

Training exercises must be carefully constructed to illustrate examples of expression of thought. I continually remind my students and trainees that while some statement are clearly expressions predominantly of affect, others express thought. Contrast, for example, the following expressions of feeling: "I really wish he'd ask me out on a date," "I hate

my mother and I don't want to be near her," "I looked like a clod when I didn't get the job and she did," with the following expressions of thought: "I think she missed the boat when she hired John," "I'm not pleased with Alan's performance on the job," or "It is unfair to ask me to take that assignment again." The last three statements express judgment and evaluation. It is important to mirror back to the speaker the judgments and evaluations expressed so that he or she can understand them, examine the basis on which they are made, and either continue to own them or finally disclaim them. An authentic discussion of them cannot be entertained if the listener mirrors them back as expressions of feeling only.

However, to illustrate the simultaneous presence of both thought and feeling, we could take each of the above statements and identify cognitive data as well as affective data. For instance, in the phrase "I think she missed the boat when she hired John," there is evidence of disappointment and displeasure (affect) as well as evaluation and judgment (cognitive data). It is important to illustrate this simultaneous functioning at dual levels. We come closer to exemplifying the complexity of expression and communication and the consequent magnitude of the task of listening. Simplistic analyses can only be counterproductive.

To facilitate the process of listening for cognitive as well as affective data, I use a variety of coaching phrases

to amplify the expression "catch the feeling." Some of these phrases are: "tell the person what idea she is conveying to you," "catch what the person is saying," "see what the person is seeing," or "let him know that you understand his thought." These and other such phrases broaden the task of the listener and prevent narrowing in only on feeling.

Students in training often detect the dichotomy between the contrived world of the training session and real life situations. They understand that feeling is important but they know that thinking is also important despite the sometimes shortsightedness of trainers.

To lend credibility to our human relations training and to touch the quick of reality, it might do human relations persons well to re-examine their approach to training. If they have fallen into the pitfall of stressing only understanding feelings and have come to equate this with training in empathy, then their training may lack relevance. They may need a fresh approach. A fresh approach for me meant engineering a concept I call kenepathy; for others it may mean some other means. Whatever the corrective be, it would seem that the time is ripe for a movement toward a confluent approach to training individuals in the art of listening.

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